

Chapter One

Misfnah There is a Biblical obligation to recite the *Shema* twice daily: once when we lie down at night and once when we arise in the morning, as the verse states: וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ, *when you lie down and when you arise* (Deuteronomy 6:7; see Chapter Introduction). This obligation is not tied, however, to the moment that the individual goes to sleep or gets up. Rather, it relates to the time when it is customary for people to engage in these activities, whether the individual in question does so or not.^[1] The following Mishnah delineates the time period in which the evening *Shema* may be said:^[2]

בִּין מֵאִימָתִי קוּרִין אֶת שְׁמַע בְּעֶרְבִין – **From when may we fulfill the obligation to recite^[3] the *Shema* in the evenings?** מִשְׁעָה שֶׁהַכֹּהֲנִים נִכְנְסִים לְאָכֹל בְּתֵרוּמָתָן **– From the time that Kohanim who were *tamei* may enter to eat^[4] their *terumah*; i.e. at nightfall.^[5]** עַד סוּף הָאֶשְׁמוּרָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה – **And one may recite the *Shema* until the end of the first watch; i.e. until midnight.** דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר – **these are the words of R' Eliezer.^[6]** וְהַכְמִים אֹמְרִים עַד הַצֹּהַר – **But the Sages say: It may be recited until midnight.** רַבִּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אָמַר – **Rabban Gamliel says: עַד שֶׁיֵּצֵא עֲמוּד הַשָּׁחַר – It may be recited until the light of dawn rises.^[7]**

The Mishnah recounts an incident:

מַעֲשֵׂה וּבָאוּ בְנֵי מִבֵּית הַמִּשְׁתֶּה – **It once happened that [Rabban Gamliel's] sons came home after midnight from a banquet.^[8]** אָמְרוּ לוֹ – **They said to [Rabban Gamliel]: לֹא קָרִינוּ אֶת שְׁמַע – We have not yet recited the *Shema*; may we recite it now?** אָמַר לָהֶם – **He said to them: אִם לֹא עָלָה עֲמוּד הַשָּׁחַר חֵיבִין אַתֶּם לְקִרְוֹת – If the light of dawn has not yet risen you are obligated to recite the *Shema*.**

NOTES

1. *Sifrei* (cited by *Rashi* to this verse) gives the Scriptural basis for this understanding of the requirement. This point will be elaborated further in the Mishnah and Gemara on 10b, 11a.

2. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the *Shema* consists of three Scriptural passages. *Shaagas Aryeh* (§8 and §9) argues, however, that the disputes that follow in the Mishnah and Gemara concerning the earliest and latest times for *Shema* pertain specifically to the first two of these passages, not the third. This is because the obligation to recite the third passage does not derive from the verse וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ, *when you lie down and when you arise*, but from an entirely separate obligation to remember the Exodus each day and night (see Mishnah below, 12b). Thus, the times for its recital depend simply on night and day and not on the times of lying down and arising. See, however, the opinion of *Rabbeinu Yonah* cited at the end of note 5 below.

3. Literally: to read or call out. Though the word קוּרָא most commonly means *read*, this cannot be its meaning here, since there is no obligation to read the *Shema* from a scroll or book and one may recite it by heart (see *Orach Chaim* 49:1, *Tosafos*, *Temurah* 14b שבְּכַתְּבֵי דְרַ"ה דְּבֵרִים). Thus, its meaning here is to “say out loud” (*Tiferes Yisrael* §1). [Indeed, *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 61:26) cites a custom to say the *Shema* out loud.] Others suggest that in Mishnaic Hebrew the verb *to read* is used idiomatically for the recitation of anything that is written, whether it is actually read or recited by heart (*Tos. Anshei Shem* to the Mishnah, who cites a Mishnah in *Yoma* 68b as an example of this).

4. [The expression לְאָכֹל, *enter to eat*, is not used uniquely for *terumah* but is a general idiom for returning home to eat (see Baraisos cited on 2b).]

5. *Terumah* is the portion of the crop of Eretz Yisrael that must be given to a Kohen. It may be eaten only by Kohanim who are *tahor*. A Kohen who becomes *tamei* is forbidden to eat *terumah* until he immerses himself in a *mikveh* on the designated day and then awaits nightfall (*Negaim* 14:3; *Yevamos* 74b), i.e. יֵצֵאת הַכּוֹכָבִים, *when the stars come out*, as the Gemara will state below. [The Gemara will explain why the Mishnah gives the time for reciting the evening *Shema* in terms of when Kohanim may resume eating *terumah* and not simply by saying “when the stars come out.”]

The word בְּשֹׁכְבְךָ, *when you lie down*, teaches that the earliest time one may recite the evening *Shema* is when people go to sleep. Accordingly, one cannot fulfill the evening obligation before the stars come out, since that is not yet a time for sleeping (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* notes that it was the custom to recite the *Shema* as part of Maariv prayers in the synagogue, even though the congregation prayed before the stars came out. But, *Rashi* asks, what is the purpose of saying the *Shema* at this time if one cannot fulfill his obligation with that recital? *Rashi*, citing *Yerushalmi*, answers that although one does not fulfill his obligation with that recital, it is the custom to say the *Shema* anyway so that our supplications (in the *Shemoneh Esrei*) should follow upon the reading of a Torah passage. Accordingly, those who pray before the stars appear have an obligation to repeat the *Shema* once the stars

come out. Nevertheless, since one need only repeat the first portion of the *Shema* to fulfill his Biblical obligation (the *Shema* passage itself; see Chapter Introduction), one discharges his obligation in any case with the *Shema* that is customarily recited in bed before going to sleep (*Rashi*).

Tosafos (ד"ה מאימתי) challenge *Rashi's* view on a number of grounds. As a result, *Rabbeinu Tam* concludes that the custom of praying Maariv before nightfall does not follow the view of our Mishnah, but rather the view of R' Yehudah, who rules in the Mishnah on 26a that Minchah can be said only up to an hour and a quarter before nightfall (a period known as *plag haminchah*). It follows, *Rabbeinu Tam* says, that once this moment has passed, one can pray the Maariv service – including the *Shema* – even though it is still before nightfall.

Rashi's view, however, is widely shared. It is the view of *Rav Amram Gaon* and *Rav Hai Gaon* (cited in *Rosh*), as well as of *Rif*, *Rambam* (*Krias Shema* 1:9), *Rabbeinu Yonah*, *Rashba* and others. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 235:1) rules in accord with *Rashi's* view. However, *Rashi's* assertion that one who says the *Shema* before the stars come out need only repeat the first section is not universally accepted; *Rabbeinu Yonah* rules that the first two sections need to be repeated. *Mishnah Berurah* (235:11, citing *Shaagas Aryeh* §2 and §3) states that it is proper for a person to recite all three sections of the *Shema* (see also *Magen Avraham* there).]

6. The night is divided into three “watches”; thus, the “first watch” is the first third of the night (*Rashi*, from Gemara 3a).

R' Eliezer understands the word בְּשֹׁכְבְךָ, *when you lie down*, to refer to the time when people go to sleep. He therefore rules that one may fulfill his obligation to recite the *Shema* only during the first third of the night (*Rashi* here and to 3a אליעזר ר' ד"ה לאו ר' אליעזר), for by the end of that period anyone who plans on going to sleep for the night has already done so (*Rashi* 4a לימרו כ"ר אליעזר ד"ה).

7. There is a dispute among the Poskim as to whether this refers to the very first rays of dawn that appear on the eastern horizon (*Magen Avraham* 89:3), or to the spread of light across the entire eastern horizon [which occurs a bit later] (*Eliyahu Rabbah* there; see further in *Mishnah Berurah* 89:3 and *Beur Halachah* (Eliyahu Rabbah there). [In practical terms גְּלוֹת עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר is considered to occur 72 minutes before sunrise (*Rambam's Commentary* to this Mishnah). Others maintain that it is 90 minutes before sunrise (see *Rashi* 2b ומקמי ד"ה and *Magen Avraham* 89:2).]

Rabban Gamliel defines the term בְּשֹׁכְבְךָ, *when you lie down*, to mean the entire time that people sleep, not necessarily when they go to sleep. Accordingly, the time for reciting the evening *Shema* extends through the entire night (*Rashi*). The Sages also agree with this definition; nevertheless, they limit the allotted time to midnight to insure that people will not fall asleep and forget to say the *Shema* (Gemara 4b and 9a). See further, end of note 11.

8. Literally: house of drinking. *Rambam* (*Commentary* to this Mishnah) states that this phrase refers to any gathering in which drinking wine figures prominently. *Tos. Yom Tov*, in his commentary to *Erwin* 8:1, states that wherever the term בֵּית הַמִּשְׁתֶּה is used, it refers to a wedding. (See *Beis Yosef* to *Orach Chaim* 99 and *Mor U'Ketziyah* *ibid*.)

